

OUR GOAL:
Provide stable,
nurturing, and
permanent
placements
as quickly as
possible for
children who are
placed into out-
of-home care

Amber is an extremely medically fragile child, born with a malformed heart and many related medical problems. Amber's heart required surgery, but her body was not ready. At two years of age, she was diagnosed as failure to thrive in her parent's home and placed at a facility that provides care to medically fragile children.

Amber quickly gained the necessary weight for her surgery, but it was not successful. Her medical team determined that further surgery would not be in her best interests. They do not expect her to live past her teen years.

Amber's quality of life is her doctor's main concern. Although she may not survive a common cold, her doctor gave permission for Amber to leave the medical facility, return to her family, and attend school. However, Amber's parents had not met her medical needs before the surgery, and were still not prepared to do so.

Amber's mother contacted Child Welfare Services (CWS) for help. She was offered Intensive Family Preservation Services (IFPS) to help transition Amber home and care for her. Amber's parents agreed to these services, but did not participate in them. They abandoned Amber, moving away without telling anyone or leaving any contact information. When located, Amber's mother said that they did not want her back—it was too hard to visit or take care of her.

None of Amber's relatives could provide a permanent home, and finding suitable foster families for medically fragile children is difficult. Luckily, a teacher's aide at the developmental preschool Amber attended heard about her situation. The aide brought her family to meet Amber, and together they decided they wanted to adopt her. Their commitment to Amber was obvious as they pursued an adoptive home study on their own

and took all the required training to meet Amber's medical needs.

Amber went for her first overnight visit with her new family in the fall of 2005. Although she was strongly bonded with the staff members who had cared for her for over three years at the medical facility, she refused to go back. She wanted her own home and her own family very much.

Their commitment to Amber was obvious as they pursued an adoptive home study on their own and took all the required training to meet Amber's medical needs.

Amber's adoptive family is delighted that she's joined them, and they are dedicated to providing Amber with "as normal and fun a life as possible for as long

as she has." She is "very, very loved" in her new home, and is enjoying the support of a large extended family. At the end of Fiscal Year 2006, Amber was preparing to enter kindergarten, and taking ballet lessons!



The Children's Administration recognizes that removing children from their families, no matter how troubled, is a painful experience.

The goal of permanency planning is to provide children with safe, stable environments, and nurturing caregivers who are committed to life-long relationships with their children. A sense of urgency exists for every child who is not in a permanent home. The administration seeks to achieve permanency for children through reunification with their families, adoption, guardianships, and the establishment of permanent legal custody with a third party (someone other than the child's parents).

Families have been faced with increasingly difficult challenges over the past decade. Poverty and substance abuse are impacting the ability of some families to care for their children. Several states have recently reported methamphetamine-related increases in the out-of-home placement of children and decreases in the successful and timely reunification of families.¹

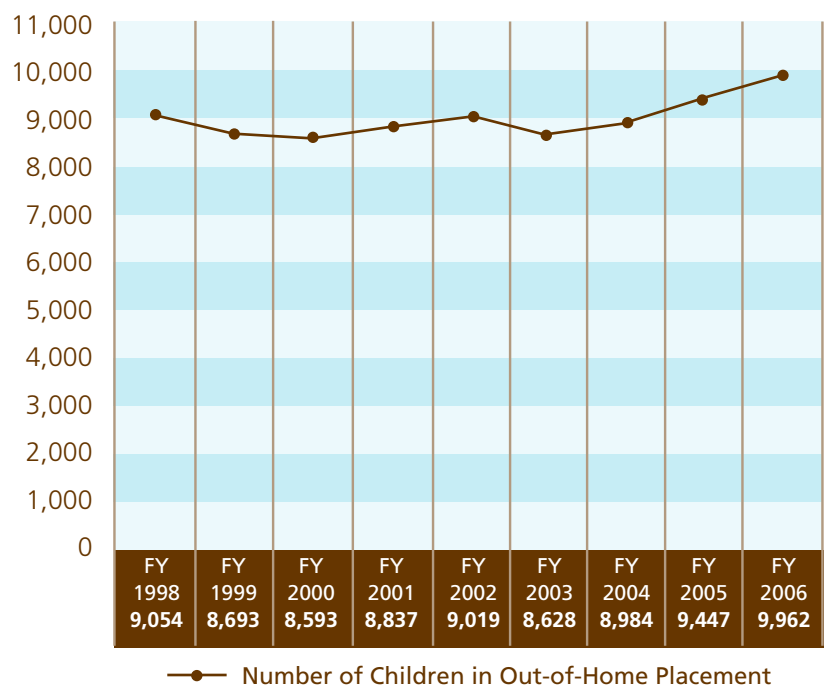
The administration continuously works to provide adequate support to children in out-of-home care and their caregivers, and to provide permanent plans for children that prioritize child safety and well-being.

The administration maintains permanency objectives including: increasing permanency for children in out-of-home care, decreasing length of stay without increasing reentry, increasing stability for children in out-of-home care, decreasing over-representation of minority children in care, and increasing relative placements.

In an effort to monitor the administration's progress regarding these objectives, the following performance measures are used:

- Children reunified with their families.
- Children reunified within 12 months of placement.
- Children adopted.
- Children adopted within 24 months of placement.
- Children placed in guardianships.
- Length of stay for children in care.
- Children reentering care.
- Children with no more than two placements.
- Minority children in care for more than two years.
- Children placed with relatives.

Children Cared for in Out-of-Home Placement*



¹National Association of Counties (2005), The Meth Epidemic in America: Two Surveys of U.S. Counties www.naco.org/Content/ContentGroups/Publications1/Press_Releases/Documents/NACo-MethSurvey.pdf

*Count of children in out-of-home care on the last day of the fiscal year, excluding children in guardianships. Source: July 2006 CAMIS download.

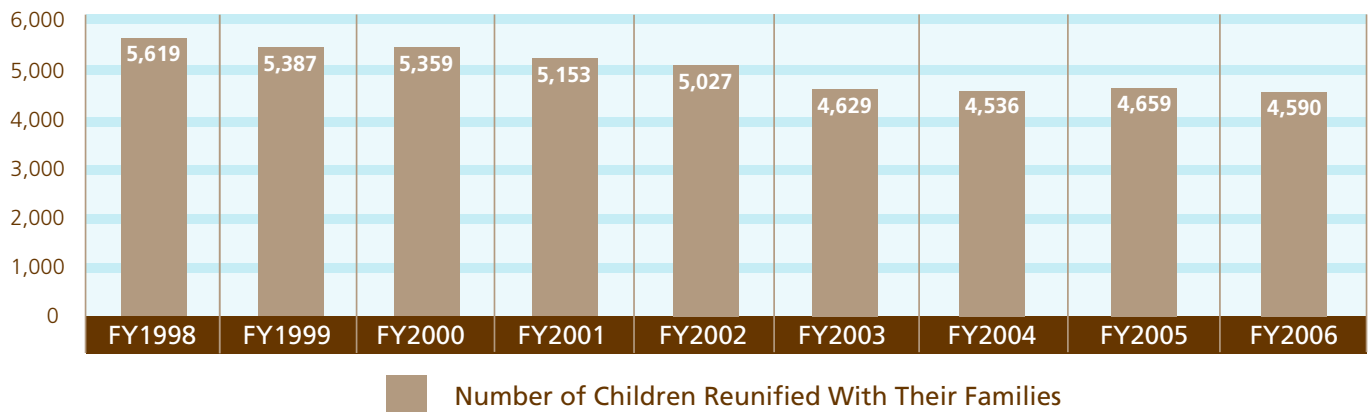
OBJECTIVE: Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care
MEASURED BY: Children reunified with their families



The Children's Administration seeks family reunification as the preferred permanency option whenever it is safe and in the best interest of the child or children involved.

The number of children reunified with their families decreased significantly between Fiscal Years 1998 and 2003, and has remained steady since. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy conducted a study of this trend in 2004.¹ It found that one factor which may have contributed to the decrease in number of reunifications is a shift in the makeup of the administration's caseload toward cases where reunification is more challenging to achieve, including: more infants placed in care, more children placed for neglect or parental substance abuse, and more children placed with relatives.

Children Reunified*



¹Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2004), [Decline in Washington's Family Reunifications: What Influenced This Trend?](http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/04-05-3901-ES.pdf) Document Number 04-05-3901, www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/04-05-3901-ES.pdf

*Unduplicated count of children placed in out-of-home care who were reunified with their families. Children may be placed in out-of-home care and reunified with their families more than once during a fiscal year, and previous Children's Administration Performance Reports used duplicated counts. Source: September 2006 CAMIS download.

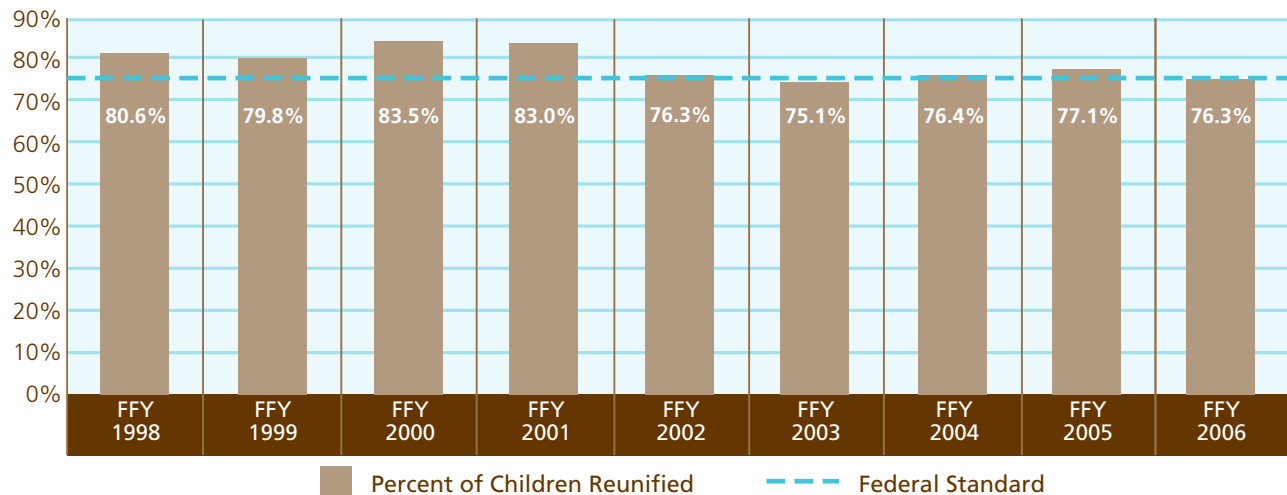
OBJECTIVE: Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care
MEASURED BY: Children reunified within 12 months of placement

Whenever it is safe and in the best interest of the child, the Children's Administration works to reunify children with their families, following a reunification and safety assessment and thorough transition planning.

The federal standard requires that at least 76.2 percent of children for whom reunification is the best permanent outcome be reunified within 12 months of out of home placement. This standard reflects the importance of early and timely permanency for children.

Washington State has historically done well with reference to this measure, having met the standard for all but one year of the nine-year period documented.

Children Reunified Within 12 Months of Placement*



*Percent of children reunified with their families within 12 months of placement into out-of-home care. The federal standard is 76.2 percent or higher. Source: federal fiscal year data as of June 2006 submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

Making Permanency a Priority

Sixteen children had adoptions finalized on a single day in June of 2006 as a result of the administration's commitment to permanency for children in out-of-home care.

Several social workers noted that a busy court calendar was delaying the completion of the adoption process for some children. One of them approached an adoptions attorney with the idea of creating an "adoption day" in court. The attorney brought the idea to a juvenile court judge, who agreed to devote an entire day to finalizing adoptions.

In preparation, adoptions staff worked hard to ensure that the appropriate paperwork was completed and requirements were fulfilled—even holding "Traveling Redaction Parties" to ready all of the children's extensive case records for disclosure to their adoptive families.

When the big day arrived, the kids and their adoptive families were ready to celebrate! Amid balloons, hugs, tears, and laughter, the families filled the courtroom with a round of applause as the judge signed each Adoption Decree.

OBJECTIVE: MEASURED BY:

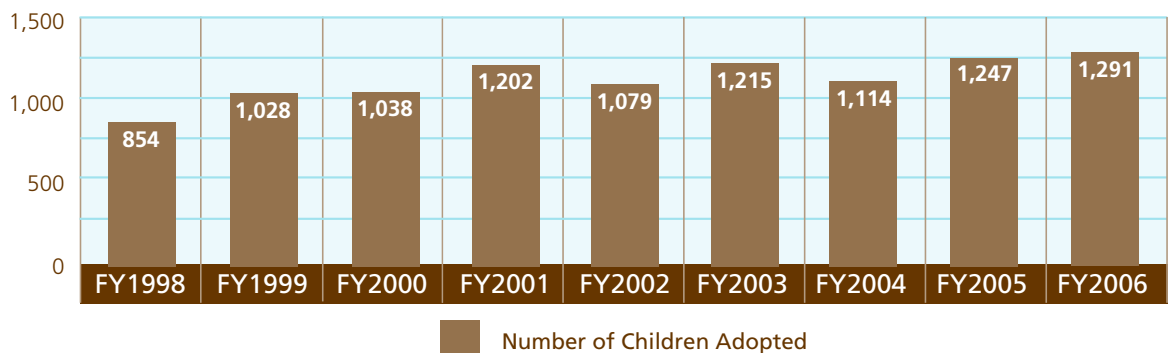
Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care
Children adopted

Children who are in out-of-home care and unable to return to their family want a family to call their own. They want the same things that most children want: to have parents who love them unconditionally, to play and participate in normal childhood activities, and to have a place to call home.

The Children's Administration strives to find appropriate, qualified families to meet the needs of these children. Local and community resources are used to assist in finding the right families to nurture and care for children who have suffered from abuse and neglect.

The number of adoptions in Washington State has grown significantly over the course of the past nine years, with more than 10,000 children gaining new families and homes. In Fiscal Year 2006, more children than ever, a total of 1,291, had adoptions finalized.

Children Adopted*



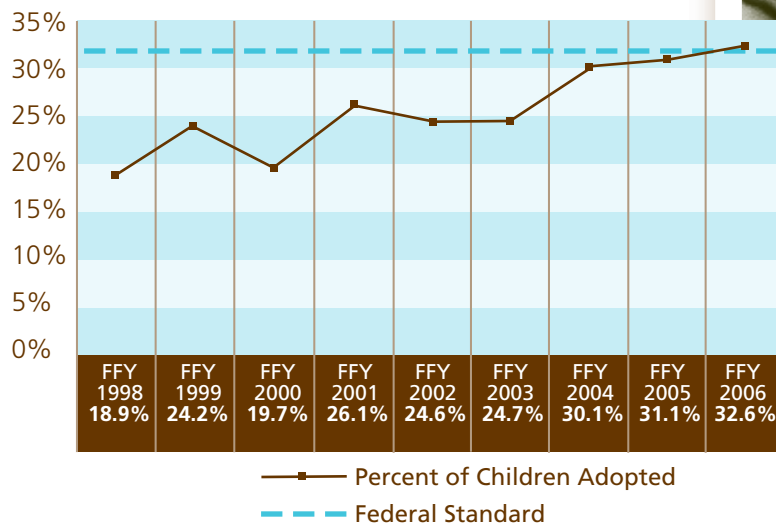
*Number of children placed in out-of-home care with an accomplished permanent plan of adoption as of the end of the fiscal year. Source: October 2006 CAMIS download.

OBJECTIVE: Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care
MEASURED BY: Children adopted within 24 months of placement

The older children get, the more difficult it is to find an appropriate family to meet their needs. Thus, older children tend to stay longer in foster care while additional recruitment options are explored. Like all children, these children want a loving family to call their own. Like all children, they deserve to have a loving family.

The federal practice standard for timely adoptions is for at least 32 percent of children with an identified permanency goal of adoption to be adopted within 24 months of placement into out-of-home care. Thanks to the commitment of social work staff to best practice and involvement with community partners, Fiscal Year 2006 marks the first time Washington State has met this standard.

Children Adopted Within 24 Months of Placement*



*Percent of children with a permanency plan of adoption who were adopted within 24 months of placement into out-of-home care. The federal standard is 32 percent or higher. Source: federal fiscal year data as of June 2006 submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

OBJECTIVE: Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care
MEASURED BY: Children placed in guardianships

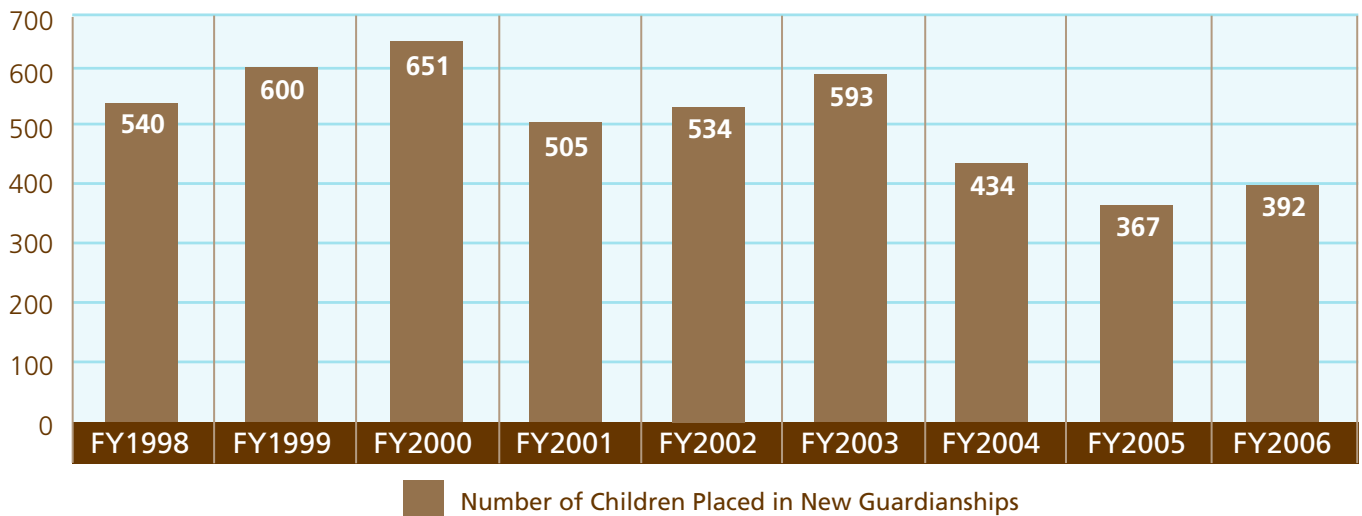
The needs of some children are best met through a guardianship. These are children for whom reunification, adoption, or third-party custody are not in their best interest. These may be children whose parents are not able to parent them, but can maintain a relationship that does not interfere with the child's permanency and stability.



In some situations, adoption may be contrary to the customs or beliefs of certain cultural groups. When it is in the best interest of a child to maintain important familial or cultural ties, guardianship may be the best permanency option.

The number of new guardianships granted has been significantly lower during the past three fiscal years than in previous years. This may be due to the Children's Administration's commitment to pursuing reunifications, adoption, or third-party custody as preferred permanent plans for children whenever possible. Additionally, in January 2005, the administration provided new policy direction to social workers on establishing guardianships, which may be contributing to more thoughtful permanency planning.

Children Placed in Guardianships*



*Number of children placed in out-of-home care with an accomplished permanent plan of placement in a guardianship granted through either the Superior Court or Juvenile Court system. Source: September 2006 CAMIS download.

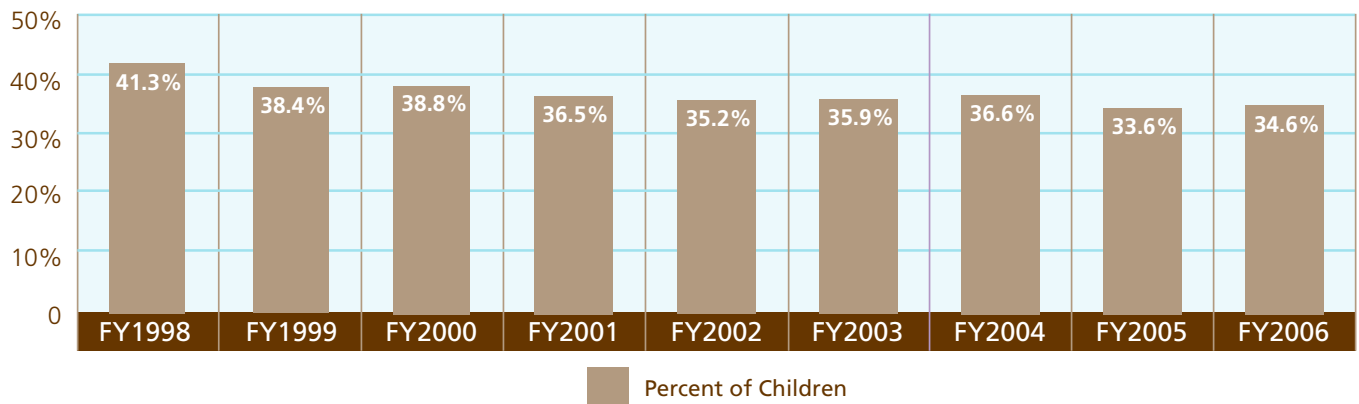
OBJECTIVE: Decrease length of stay without increasing reentry
MEASURED BY: Length of stay for children in care

Whenever children must be placed into out-of-home care to provide for their safety, the Children's Administration makes every effort ensure that their temporary placement is stable and that a permanent home is secured as quickly as possible.

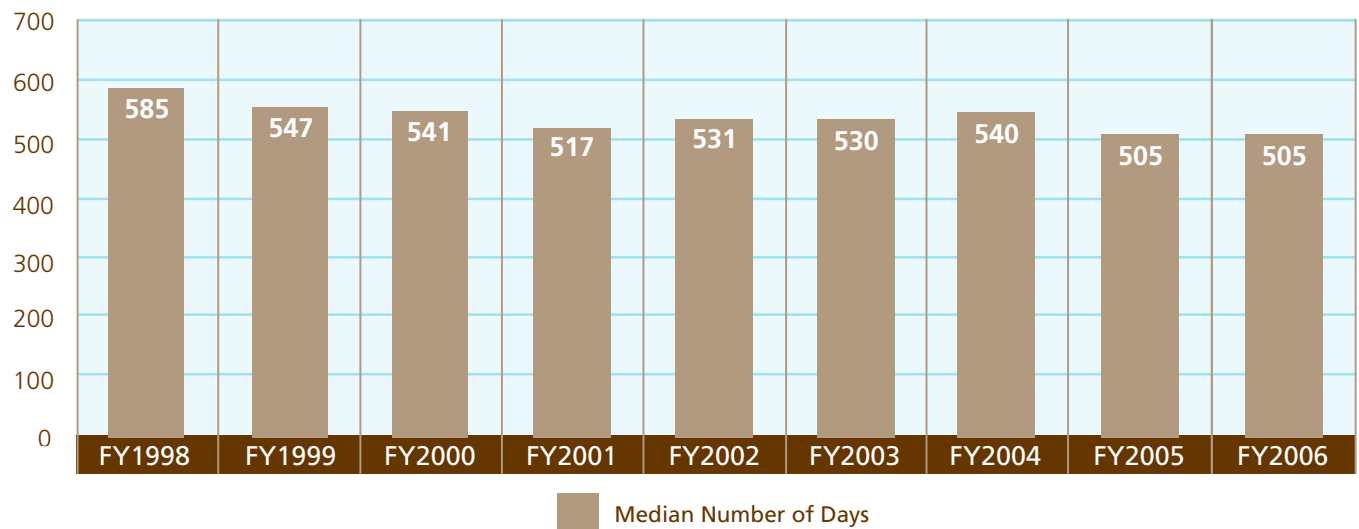
The percent of children who have been in care longer than two years has decreased from 41.3 percent in Fiscal Year 1998 to 34.6 percent in Fiscal Year 2006.

The median number of days children spend in out-of-home care has ranged from a high of 585 days in Fiscal Year 1998 to a low of 505 in Fiscal Years 2005 and 2006.

Children in Care for More Than 2 Years*



Median Number of Days Children are Placed in Care**



*Percent of children in the administration's custody in out-of-home care for more than 60 days, who have a cumulative time in care during their current placement episode of more than two years. Source: September 2006 CAMIS download.

**Median cumulative time in care for all children in care for more than 60 days. This measure is calculated based upon the population of children in care for more than 60 days to more clearly depict the status of children for whom the administration is actively conducting permanency planning. Sixty days was the chosen "cut off" point because children who stay in care at least 60 days must have a permanency plan completed at this point. If children placed for very short periods of time were included in this measure, it would inaccurately skew the understanding of the percent of children who are placed for much longer periods of time. Source: July 2006 CAMIS download.

OBJECTIVE: Decrease length of stay without increasing reentry
MEASURED BY: Children reentering care

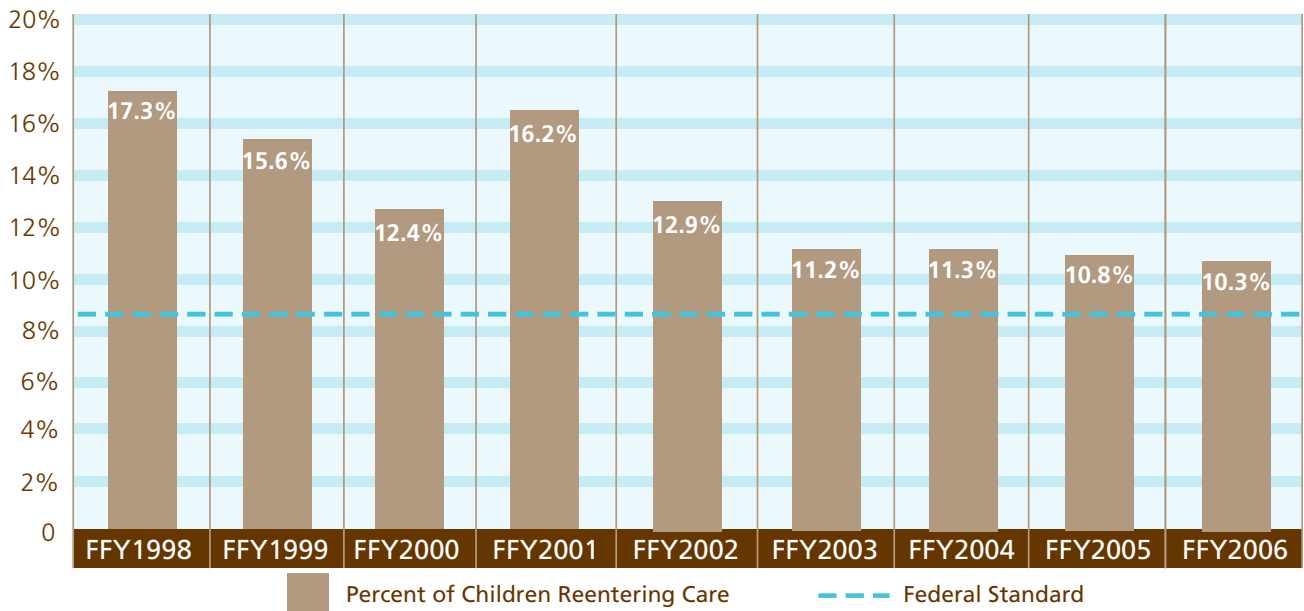
The Children's Administration seriously considers the decision to recommend the removal of children from their homes and families. Likewise, the decision to return children home is made with careful consideration, and requires specific supports and safeguards to see to it that the actions resulting in a child's removal do not occur again.

The administration supports the successful reunification of families through the development of transition and safety plans. On-going social worker contact with families ensures that transition and safety plans are followed, and that parents adhere to the conditions required to have their children returned to them. Even when great care is taken, there are children who will be placed into out-of-home care again due to new allegations of abuse or neglect following reunification with their families.

The federal standard requires that no more than 8.6 percent of children reenter out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification.

Washington State has struggled to meet this standard, and has been unable to do so throughout the nine years that this measure has been tracked. Progress has been made in the past five years, with Fiscal Year 2006 marking the lowest reentry rate in nine years. This progress is due in part to the administration's requirement that formal reunification assessments be done for all dependent children less than 12 years of age and in care for more than 60 days due to child abuse or neglect, starting in 2002. However, the state performance rate still exceeds the federal standard by nearly 2 percent.

Children Reentering Care Within 12 Months of Reunification*



*Percent of children who reentered out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification with their parents, regardless of length of stay. The federal standard is 8.6 percent or less. Source: federal fiscal year data as of June 2004 submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

OBJECTIVE: Increase stability for children in out-of-home care
MEASURED BY: Children with no more than two placements

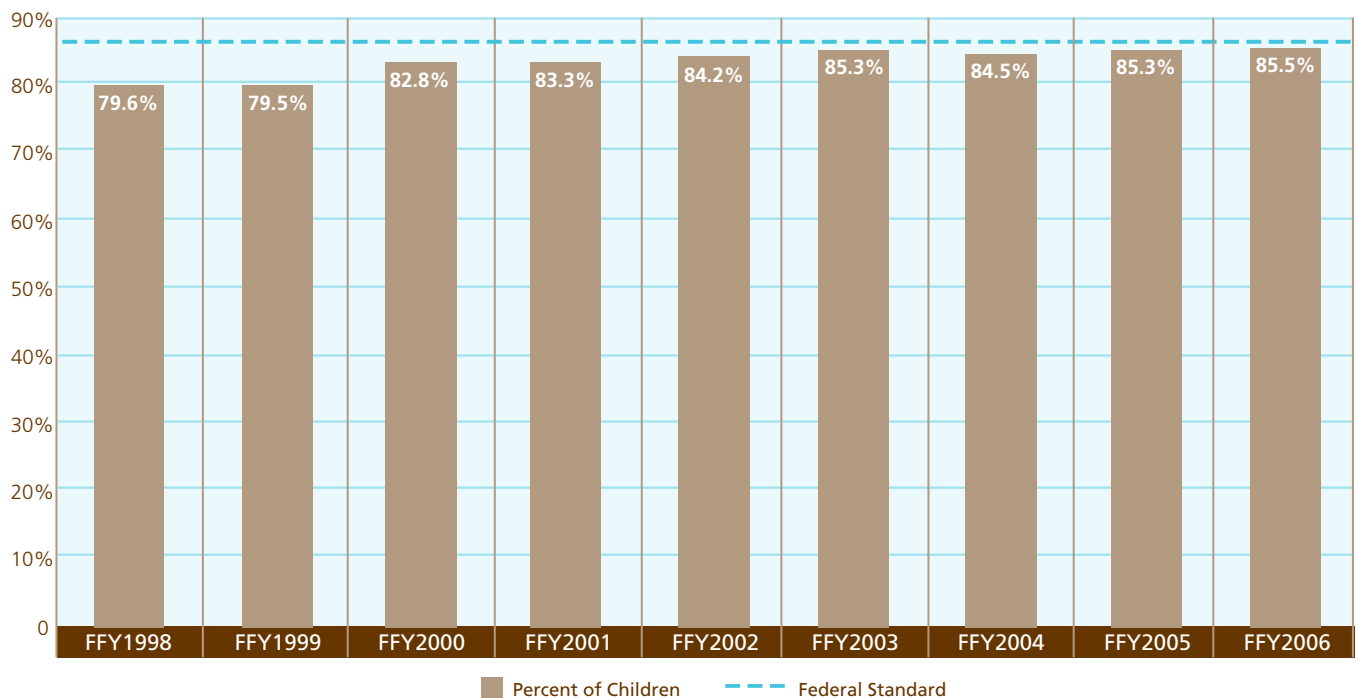
When children are placed in out-of-home care, they must be able to adjust to a new home, recognize the home's routines and rules, and establish new relationships.

These kinds of adjustments require time and energy, and each time a child experiences a change in out-of-home placement the process must begin again.

Children who move numerous times while in out-of-home care may become frustrated and tired, and may grow fearful of establishing new relationships because they have learned that the people they form bonds with will be temporary figures in their lives.

The Children's Administration recognizes how important it is for children to experience stability while in out-of-home placement, and continues to move toward the federal standard of 86.7 percent or more stable placements. Increased awareness of the impacts of multiple placements on children and recent requirements for social workers to develop plans with families and children to stabilize placements have contributed to the administration's progress over the past nine years.

Children With No More Than Two Placements*



*Percent of children who have only one or two principle places or homes of residence (placement events) during their first 12 months in care (or exiting from care within 12 months), excluding respite care, hospital stays, on-the-run, and similar types of placements which do not represent a deliberate change of residence. The federal standard is 86.7 percent or higher. Source: federal fiscal year data as of June 2006 submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

OBJECTIVE: Decrease over-representation of minority children in care
MEASURED BY: Minority children in care for more than two years

Throughout Washington State and across the nation, there are disproportionate numbers of African American and Native American children in out-of-home care in comparison to the general population. These children also tend to stay in care for longer periods of time than other racial and ethnic groups.

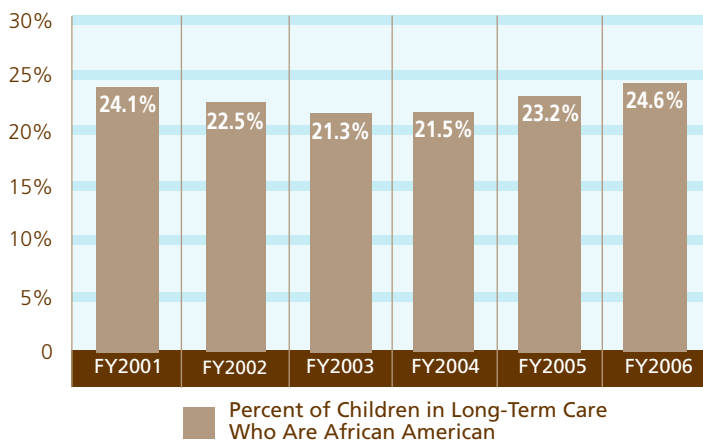
The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) states that, “Nationally African-American children are four times as likely and American Indian children about 3.5 times as likely as white children to be in protective custody.” In addition, CWLA states that nationwide, “Children of color are likely to stay in foster care for longer periods of time and are less likely to be either returned home or adopted.”¹

The Children’s Administration has tracked disproportionality in Washington State since 2001, and established the Office of African American Children’s Services in King County in an effort to address system issues and improve practice with reference to African American children and their families.

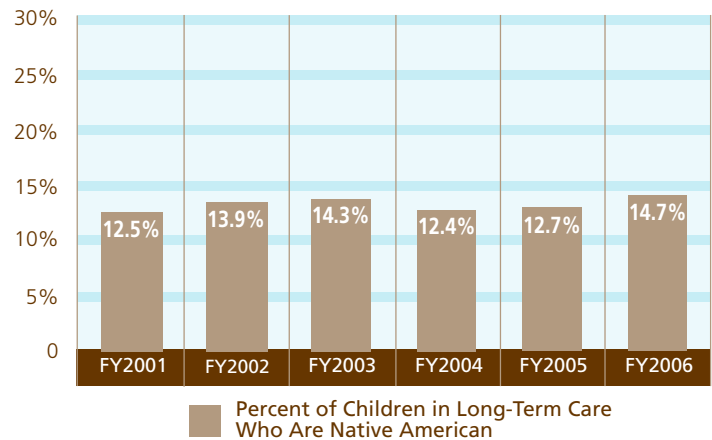
The administration has also worked toward increasing consultation and collaboration with Tribes statewide, in order to improve compliance with Indian Child Welfare Act mandates and improve outcomes for Native American children.

The number and proportion of African American and Native American children in care for longer than two years increased in Fiscal Year 2006. This reinforces the need for continuing and sustained efforts to address this issue.

African American Children in Care for More Than 2 Years*



Native American Children in Care for More Than 2 Years**



¹ Child Welfare League of America (2003), *Disproportionality - Facts about Children in Foster Care* www.fostercaremonth.org/mediakit/

* Percent of children who have been placed in out-of-home care for two years or longer who are not in their permanent home and are African American. Source: September 2006 CAMIS download.

** Percent of children who have been placed in out-of-home care for two years or longer who are not in their permanent home and are Native American. Source: September 2006 CAMIS download.

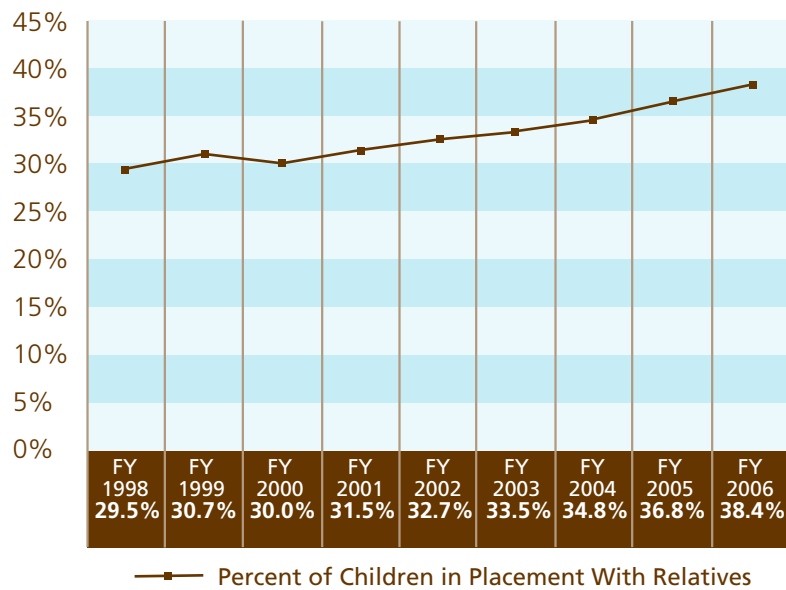
OBJECTIVE: Increase relative placements
MEASURED BY: Children placed with relatives

Children who must be removed from the homes of their parents due to abuse or neglect often benefit greatly from maintaining ongoing relationships with their extended families of origin. When it is safe and in the best interest of the child, the Children's Administration seeks out extended family members as potential placement options for children who cannot go home temporarily, or who require new homes permanently.

The administration has significantly increased the percent of children placed with extended family members from 29.5 percent at the end of Fiscal Year 1998 to 38.4 percent at the end of Fiscal Year 2006.



Children in Placement With Relatives*



*The percent of children in placement with a relative on the last day of the fiscal year. Source: July 2006 CAMIS download.

In Washington State, there are 1,200 to 1,300 legally free children and youth annually who place their hope on hold as they wait for that one “forever” family who will make the ultimate investment of heart and home in them.

These are just a few stories of children and youth who still wait for homes and hope...

Isaiah is 10 years old and has been waiting for nine years. When asked what he wants to be when he grows up, Isaiah simply replied, “I want to be a positive person.” He is described as having a great sense of humor and is just “a great child to be around and hang out with.” He is a natural athlete and excels at skateboarding; in fact, he continues to improve his skateboarding skills because “maybe if I skateboard well enough, someone will adopt me.”

Sisters **Heather and Jordin** are 14 and 11 and have been waiting together for nearly 7 years. Heather loves basketball and music, and while she hates to admit it, she’s pretty fond of her younger sister. Jordin loves to draw and eat, and says that she doesn’t think she would have survived without Heather taking care of her as a child. Jordin says she would show a new family that she cared about them by being nice, and Jordin just wants a family who will love her and her sister, “no matter what.”

Josh is 14 and has been waiting for 4 years. Josh loves all things mechanical, is fond of paintball combat, and is a bit of a jokester. He enjoys seeing his friends at school and really wants “to have a family to hang out with.” Josh loves animals and would enjoy a home with cats or dogs. As for siblings, Josh says, “I definitely don’t want to be the only kid, that would be too boring.”

Anthony is 12 and has been waiting for 4 years. Anthony loves baseball and wants a family again so he can play catch. He says families are important because they give you “love and care and food.” When asked what he would do for a new family, Anthony replied, “I would do my chores, and pick up my room, and do my laundry, and take a shower, and I wouldn’t complain about it.”

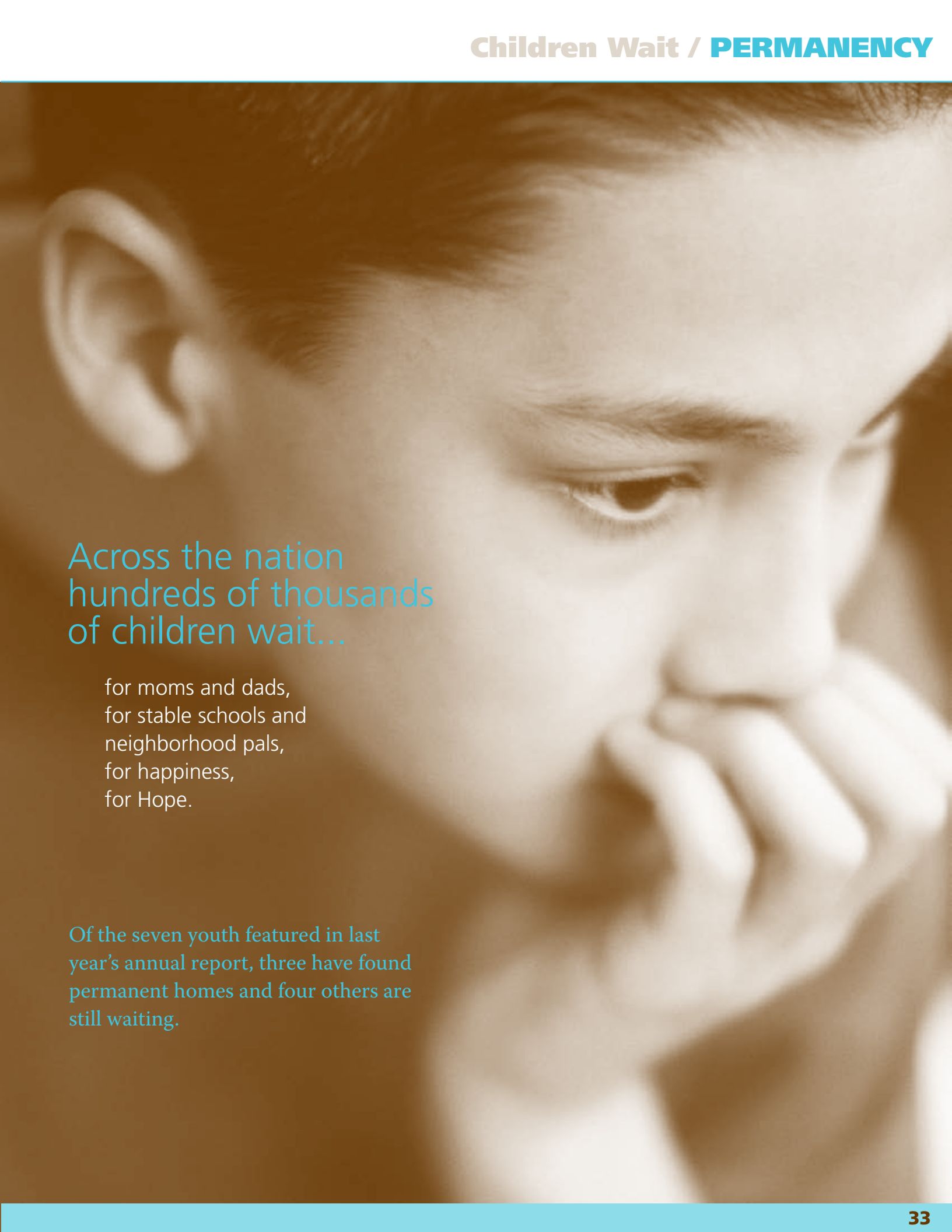
Victor is 14 years old and has been waiting for 2 years. Victor is soft spoken but very active. He likes to play basketball, listen to his radio, and play games. Victor says he has never really lived in a family where he has felt truly safe, cared for, and wanted. He wants a family that will be active and can do things together. Victor really wants a father in his life but most of all, he says, “I just want to stay in one house without moving.”

The Children’s Administration and our regional and national partners are working to find homes that meet the needs of all of our waiting children. The one thing we cannot provide these children with is that sense of worth and belonging that comes only from the experience of being chosen to be a part of a family, unconditionally, through good times and bad, forever.

If you would like to be a source of hope for these or other waiting children, please contact any of the following:

- Washington Adoption Resource Network** www.warekids.org
1-800-927-9411
- Northwest Adoption Exchange*** www.nwae.org
1-800-927-9411
- Northwest Resource Associates** www.nwresource.org/af.htm
- Families Like Ours** www.familieslikeours.org
(206) 441-7602
- Adopt U.S. Kids** www.adoptuskids.org
1-888-200-4005

* Information about waiting children included on this page is excerpted from the Northwest Adoption Exchange Website.



Across the nation
hundreds of thousands
of children wait...

for moms and dads,
for stable schools and
neighborhood pals,
for happiness,
for Hope.

Of the seven youth featured in last
year's annual report, three have found
permanent homes and four others are
still waiting.